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SUBJECT: UNRWA LEBANON DESPERATE FOR RESOURCES

¶1. (C) Summary: UNRWA Lebanon will exhaust its funding by March 2010 and be forced to make drastic cuts without additional support, United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Lebanon country representative Salvatore Lombardo told donor countries on January 15. While PM Hariri and the new Lebanese government has yet to define a clear strategy on Palestinian issues, Lombardo assessed, it has been more responsive to UNRWA requests recently. He also welcomed U.S. development and security assistance in and around the Nahr al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp. A significant curtailment of UNRWA Lebanon's services -- which are often the only public services available to Palestinian refugees -- would likely impact negatively on security in the camps. End summary.

UNRWA IN DIRE STRAITS

¶2. (SBU) UNRWA Lebanon resrep Lombardo pleaded for increased donor assistance during a January 15 donors meeting in Beirut. Without help, he explained, UNRWA will exhaust its funding by March 2010 and be forced to cut staff, programs and other budget items. Although Lombardo acknowledged the overwhelming donor fatigue, he underscored that his staff had recently noted an uptick in frustration in the Palestinian refugee camps that could lead to riots or other disturbances if the status quo weren't improved, let alone if existing UNRWA programs were cut.

PROVIDING SERVICES TO PREVENT EXTREMISM

¶3. (SBU) The new Lebanese government has yet to define a clear strategy on Palestinian issues, Lombardo assessed, but he added that the government in general, and the director general of antiquities in particular, have been more responsive to UNRWA requests recently and have declared their desire to cooperate fully with UNRWA initiatives. UNRWA is focusing on job creation schemes as the key to preventing unrest, Lombardo said. A representative of the Lebanese Palestinian Dialog Committee voiced his support for USAID's intention to consider activities in the area adjacent to the Nahr al-Barid Camp. He also reacted positively to a presentation update on the U.S. (State INL) project to establish an Internal Security Forces presence in the Nahr al-Barid area with the support of training and construction of police posts.

¶4. (SBU) Turning to ongoing UNRWA programs, Lombardo outlined the status of UNRWA's partnership with more than 35 health-care providers to offer health care to refugees in the coming year, and he asked for renewed donor support to maintain it beyond 2010. The UNRWA director of medical services suggested that the program should be expanded to encompass mental health and psychological counseling programs, especially for disenfranchised youth. In addition, Lombardo described recent after-school initiatives designed

to provide greater recreational opportunities for youth in the camps, and the Committee for Employment of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon (CEP) submitted its final report for 2009.

15. (C) Comment: All indicators point to increased tension inside the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The Lebanese Armed Forces have reportedly been increasing their presence around some of the more volatile camps, particularly the Beddawi camp next to Tripoli. A significant curtailment of UNRWA's services -- which are often the only public services available to Palestinian refugees -- would likely only aggravate the security situation in the camps.

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